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NBC News Links Soviet to Attempt on Pope's Life

By The Associated Press

NBC News reported yesterday that it had found evidence suggesting that Pope John Paul II was the target of an assassination attempt with the knowledge and perhaps the assistance of Soviet and Bulgarian intelligence agencies.

NBC News said the Pope was targeted because of his support of the Solidarity movement in Poland. The report also said that the Pope had sent a handwritten letter to Leonid I. Brezhnev, the Soviet leader, in 1980 in which the Polish-born Pope said he would abdicate the papacy and lead the resistance if Soviet troops invaded Poland.

The letter, reportedly delivered by a Vatican envoy, instigated a secret shuttle mission between Moscow, Rome and Warsaw that led eventually to a temporary easing of the Soviet attitude toward Solidarity, NBC News said.

It said its report came after a nine month investigation by the correspondents Marvin Kalb and Bill McLaughlin. The network released details of the investigation today in advance of the air-

ing of a documentary, "The Man Who Shot the Pope — A Study in Terrorism." It is scheduled to be broadcast Sept. 21.

In an article in the September issue of Reader's Digest, Claire Sterling, author of "The Terror Network," said the shooting of the Pope in St. Peter's Square in May 1981 was in retaliation for the Pope's support of Solidarity. Mrs. Sterling also maintained that the shooting had the backing of the Soviet Union, which she said acted through the Bulgarian intelligence organization.

[At the time of Mrs. Sterling's article, the Moscow radio broadcast a denunciation of the allegations, saying, "The absurdity and unfoundedness of this claim are obvious."]

NBC News traced what it called an unbroken line from Mehmet Ali Agca, the Turkish gunman convicted for the shooting of the Pope to organized crime elements in Turkey, the Bulgarian secret service and the K.G.B., the Soviet intelligence agency.

"A Soviet connection is strongly suggested, but it cannot be proved," Mr. Kalb said.

The correspondent said "it seems safe to conclude" that Mr. Agca had "been drawn into the clandestine network of the Bulgarian secret police and, by extension, the Soviet K.G.B."

Escaped From Prison in Turkey

NBC News said bank records showed that Mr. Agca deposited \$10,000 two months before the assassination of a Turkish newspaper editor, Abdi Ipecki. Mr. Agca was convicted of the murder but later escaped from a maximum security prison in Turkey. In addition, Mr. Agca had large sums of money deposited for him in Turkish banks while he was a student at Istanbul University.

NBC News said that Mr. Agca appeared to have been backed financially at every step of the way by organized crime in Turkey and that the Bulgarian secret service has strong ties to the Turkish syndicate.

NBC News quoted Vladimir Sakharov, a former K.G.B. agent who defected, as saying that information held by the Bulgarians would also be known by the K.G.B.